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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000510

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SUBJECT: DASHNAKS AT ODDS WITH MG APPROACH TO N-K SETTLEMENT

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Classified By: AMB Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Leaders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaksutun (Dashnaks) told EUR DAS Matthew Bryza that they oppose the Minsk Group's approach to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) conflict. The Dashnak leaders said that the settlement should come in a package deal, not step by step, and that no settlement would be acceptable to N-K's population that did not recognize the current borders of the "Nagorno Karabakh Republic." They stated that to resolve the conflict the key was for Azerbaijan to rule out the possibility of war. The leaders also warned that President Sargsian will be removed from power if he makes concessions unacceptable to N-K's population. DAS Bryza responded that the MG approach was exactly geared to rule out war as an option, and to transform the nature of the conflict along the lines of the Cyprus issue, where war is ruled out while the conflicting sides tackle the core political issues. Achieving this goal would require compromise on both sides.
END SUMMARY.

PACKAGE DEAL WITH CONCESSIONS BY BOTH SIDES

¶2. (C) On July 8, EUR DAS and Minsk Group Co-Chair for the United States Matthew Bryza met in Yerevan with Dashnak leaders Hrant Margarian, Giro Manoyan, Vahan Hovhannisian, and Armen Rustamian, to elicit their views on the N-K settlement process. Margarian is representative of the Dashnaks' worldwide Bureau and the leader of the Dashnaks. Rustamian is representative of the Dashnaks' Supreme Body in Armenia, along with Hovhannisian, who also heads the Dashnaks' faction in Armenia's parliament. Manoyan is also a member of the worldwide Bureau and heads its "Armenian Cause and Political Affairs" office. Ambassador Yovanovitch accompanied DAS Bryza to the meeting.

¶3. (C) In a warm and friendly exchange, the Dashnak leaders said they opposed the step-by-step phased approach by the Minsk Group to resolving the conflict, where Karabakhi Armenians are expected to yield all of the seven occupied territories over five years in exchange for a promised future vote for self-determination. Hrant Margarian said Armenians could only accept a package deal that entailed equal and simultaneous concessions by both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armen Rustamian stated that Armenians and Karabakhi Armenians "shed blood to secure our safety," and would never tolerate concessions that amounted to return of territories for "a promise on a piece of paper."

"NKR" BORDERS, NOT SOVIET, SHOULD BE THE BASIS

14. (C) Margarian said the current basis of the negotiations, predicated on the acknowledgment of the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh delineated by Joseph Stalin, is wrong, and that the real borders should be those making up the current-day "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic." (COMMENT: Margarian was intentionally vague on what he meant by the borders of the "NKR," although it appeared he was implying the Soviet-era borders of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast -- inside the Azerbaijan SSR -- as well as the adjoining two territories of Kelbajar and Lachin which provide the "NKR" with a stronger militarily defensible position. END COMMENT.) Margarian noted his presence in N-K during the war years, and his many trips to the enclave since, and said Karabakh Armenians will never accept "the Soviet borders." Margarian said if the goal of the settlement is long-term peace and stability for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and N-K, it will only happen if "all three countries" feel secure, otherwise instability will reign. Margarian stated that "we are not expansionists, but the borders of any country are based on historical right, on the principles of security and economic feasibility, and we have to identify N-K's borders on these principles." Margarian declared that ex-President Levon Ter-Petrossian, and his successors Robert Kocharian and Serzh Sargsian, had been wrong to acknowledge the Soviet-era borders of N-K, and that the Karabakhi Armenians should not have to pay for these mistakes.

ONLY SOLUTION IS TO RULE OUT WAR

15. (C) Margarian said negotiations to resolve the conflict would be "doomed" as long as "Azerbaijan has hopes to

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accomplish a solution through war." He stated that the "international community has to create a situation that would exclude that possibility." Vahan Hovhannisian noted that Azerbaijan always talks about "the consequences of war" instead of addressing the reasons war erupted in N-K in the first place. As long as those reasons are sustained, said Hovhannisian in referencing Azerbaijan's bellicose rhetoric and refusal to assess the origins of the conflict, "war cannot be ruled out." Hovhannisian urged the international community to be "completely intolerant" of Azerbaijan's militaristic statements.

SARGSIAN "WILL GO HOME" IF HE MAKES CONCESSIONS

16. (C) Margarian warned that President Sargsian "will go home" and be replaced by a new president if he makes concessions on N-K that are unacceptable to Karabakhi-Armenians. Margarian said "that is the reality -- we cannot yield our right to life" to any politician. Margarian said the Dashnaks have been silent on the point of concessions because "even with all of the concessions Armenia has agreed to so far, we believed Azerbaijan would not accept a resolution anyway." Margarian noted that if a "miracle" happens, however (and Azerbaijan agrees to resolving the conflict based on Armenia's concessions), "our people won't accept it."

DAS BRYZA SAYS IT'S TIME TO TRANSFORM CONFLICT

17. (C) DAS Bryza disagreed with the Dashnak leaders that Azerbaijan was not making any concessions, and said the Minsk Group strategy was precisely aimed at creating a situation where war would not be an option. He said President Aliyev's June 4 interview on Russian television contained rare public admissions that Azerbaijan accepted the need to discuss a new

legal status for N-K (though N-K,s final status would be deferred to the future) and preserving a land corridor between N-K and Armenia. Bryza also said that when Azerbaijan agrees to the Basic Principles formulated by the Minsk Group, it would amount to Baku's leaders declaring the use of force as inadmissible, as the non-use of force is a core element of the Basic Principles. Bryza then described the security measures that the two sides to the conflict and the international community would take to address N-K's security concerns, including demilitarization of the occupied territories and international peacekeepers.

18. (C) DAS Bryza said that that with the necessary compromises and security arrangements, the N-K conflict could be transformed to a conflict along the lines of the Cyprus issue, where there is no risk of war and the core (albeit irritating) political issues can be negotiated instead of fought over. DAS Bryza urged the Dashnak leaders to appreciate the opportunity before Armenia, and the gains a peace deal would confer, including N-K effectively becoming a bona fide international entity until its final status is determined at a future date. He also warned that the status quo was an untenable option for both sides, and made the resumption of hostilities inevitable. To secure Azerbaijan,s pledge not to use force (and thereby surrender what Baku perceives as its core negotiating leverage), Armenia would need to offer something in return. This was precisely what was occurring in the current round of Minsk Group negotiations. Bryza added that the settlement foreseen by the Basic Principles is indeed a package solution, as advocated by Armenia, though implementation will occur in stages.

19. (C) The Dashnaks listened intently and respectfully, often smiling and laughing as they seemed to grasp the logic behind the Minsk Group,s approach. They nevertheless convened a conference a few days later in Stepanakert denouncing the Minsk Group,s current effort to negotiate agreement of the Basic Principles. The key question is whether the Dashnaks, who command less than 10 percent of Armenia,s electorate, can catalyze enough opposition to any Minsk Group settlement at this time to damage President Sargsian politically.

10. (U) EUR DAS BRYZA has cleared this cable.
YOVANOVITCH